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This Is So Sudden!

CHARACTERS

GERTRUDE, *aged twenty-five* } *bachelor girls.*
FLORENCE, *aged twenty* }
MARIE, *aged twenty-two* }
HELEN, *a woman of the world, aged thirty-five.*
MARGARET, *a society girl.*

PLAYS TWENTY MINUTES.



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MAY 14 1915

This Is So Sudden!

SCENE.—*The living-room of a small apartment furnished in perfect taste. Various signs indicate that the inhabitants are artistic and musical. Entrances R. and L. Telephone. Sofa.*

(As the curtain rises, GERTRUDE and HELEN are in the act of fervently greeting each other. GER. is an attractive, impulsive girl of twenty-five; HELEN is ten years her senior, a woman of the world, with an abrupt and conclusive manner. All the characters greet HELEN with an air of cordial excitement; she is evidently an old and well loved friend.)

GER. So good of you to come this evening, dear! We really couldn't have waited till morning to see you.

(They sit down facing one another on the sofa.)

HELEN. Yes, I know; I felt the same way. Yet we haven't seen each other for five years,—you'd hardly think that a few more hours could make much difference!

GER. Especially when it seems so utterly natural to see you sitting there!

HELEN. My dear, it seems so utterly natural to be sitting here! Just as though I'd never been away!

GER. Only, you know, it ought to be afternoon, with the tea things. Oh, don't you want some tea now?

HELEN. No,—please! I wouldn't sleep a wink!

GER. That's so; neither would I! How foolish of me! Such delightful tea we've been having, too! Some that a friend of Marie's sent her from China.

HELEN. Really! How nice; tea is so good when it is good, and it's so hard to buy good tea.

GER. Yes, we've had the worst luck. The store we used

to buy ours from went out of business, and we tried for weeks to find a place where we—could—could—— (*She slows down, pauses a full second, as a look of astonishment comes over her face; then, explosively.*) Great heavens! Helen Roberts, do you realize what's happening? You've just come back from five whole years in England, and we're sitting here discussing tea!

HELEN. Why, yes! but I thought it was a delicate little attention on your part, to make me feel at home. That's all I've done the last five years,—discuss tea.

GER. But gracious! There ought to be a thousand things we want to say to each other. We ought to be just bursting with things to say, and—and I can't think of a blessed thing!

HELEN. Neither can I! Except drivel about our passage over, and that was simply one tea after another.

GER. (*in a tragic tone*). Doesn't it seem awful? Not a thing to talk about!

HELEN. It is rather an unheard-of predicament for two of our sex. Of course, the trouble is that we've written each other almost everything.

GER. But—but oughtn't there to be some things that you couldn't write in a letter?

HELEN. Not in our kind of letter. You even went to the extreme of giving me a detailed account of your opinion of Brahms.

GER. Well, I thought I might as well. I wanted you to know that I thought Brahms ought to be considered, at the very least, a—— (*Breaks off short; rebelliously.*) No! No! I won't talk about Brahms! I won't!

HELEN. Then let's talk about tea.

GER. No, I won't talk about tea, either. Oh, do think of some exciting topic of conversation!

HELEN. If you're after excitement, I don't see why Brahms won't do. I never saw a musician yet who didn't get violently excited the minute he began arguing about Brahms.

GER. No, I mean something exciting that concerns us!

HELEN. You? All right; why aren't you married?

GER. (*taken aback*). Me! Married! Me?

HELEN. Well, not only you, but Marie and Florence,—why aren't all of you married?

GER. Why—why, gracious, I don't know!

HELEN. But it's your business to know! Hasn't any man ever asked you, any of you?

GER. Why, yes, that is, I'm not sure; let's see. Why, no! I don't believe any man ever has!

HELEN. And for pity's sake, why not?

GER. Why—why, I don't suppose any of them ever happened to think of it!

HELEN. Do you see many men?

GER. Oh, yes! They hang around in droves. All kinds, sizes, shapes and varieties!

HELEN. And none of them ever talks business?

GER. Talks what?

HELEN. Business; two rooms and kitchenette, or words to that effect.

GER. Gracious, no!

HELEN. But they continue to hang around?

GER. Oh, my, yes! All the time!

HELEN. Then I know what's wrong. You feed them too well!

GER. Why, Helen!

HELEN. That's the trouble. A man never gets really into action as long as he's comfortable. If he's kept in a constant state of ease and comfort, he'll never budge.—But that's only the way you hold on to a man once you've got him. It's no way to effect a capture. As long as you three let it be known that you run a combination boarding-house and free lunch, you'll continue on your present spinsterial pathway. But suppose, now, that you suddenly execute a flank movement, and shut down on the food supply, plead the high cost of living or go into mourning or something. Well, if each and every one of you isn't proposed to inside of a month, then I'm no expert! Why, if you only knew how easy it is to——

GER. But, Helen! Don't you understand? We don't want to get married!

HELEN. Nonsense! Every girl wants to get married. That's why they go to college. They're afraid the men will get so much educated that the good old-fashioned methods of ensnarement will become obsolete.

GER. But we're different. We don't want to get married or do anything that would separate us. We're perfectly satisfied just as we are. We earn enough to live on; I've got my music, Marie her painting, and Florence her newspaper work.

HELEN. Newspaper work?

GER. Oh, yes! She runs a music column in one paper, and an art column in another, and she gets all her ideas from

us. It's lots of fun! And don't you see? We're all so dependent on one another. I do the cooking; Marie does the marketing; Florence keeps the accounts; Marie gets me pupils, and I sell them her paintings. Florence does all the sewing and mending and washes the dishes, and Marie's the only person in the world who can do a thing with my hair! Goodness! Do you suppose that we'd any of us give up such a well ordered and perfectly arranged existence for a man? I should hope not!

HELEN. Well, it does seem rather a bad bargain. But never you mind! Some day a tall blond will come along with the love light in his eagle eye, and one of you will flop, and flop hard!

GER. (*after a pause*). Per-haps. (*She meditates a moment; then, absently.*) Only Jack's a brunette!

HELEN (*sharply*). Jack! What Jack? Ah, I thought as much!

GER. (*breezily*). Nonsense, Helen! I just meant that—that—well, Jack Hemmingway has been here quite a lot lately.

HELEN. M-m-m-m! You mean frequently, or for long stretches?

GER. Both. And a little while ago he inherited some money. Not much, but enough.

HELEN. Enough for what?

GER. Why—why, for theatres and dinners and taxicabs and so on. It's been such fun! And of course if he went and got married, that would spoil it all!

HELEN. Unless you married him.

GER. Oh, but—but I meant—for the three of us!

HELEN. So he's attentive to each of you?

GER. Oh, no; to all of us!

HELEN. You mean all of you at once?

GER. Yes!

HELEN. He's not a man; he's a Cook's Tour! Well, I suppose if you're so well equipped with brotherly love as all that, matrimony really would be rather superfluous.

GER. Oh, entirely! (*Pensively.*) But—but he might go and marry some one not in the family!

HELEN. Don't worry; he won't let himself be captured by an outsider so long as he has three charmers like you girls to adore and feed him.

GER. But—but we don't adore him—at least not in public!

HELEN. Does he kiss you?

GER. Goodness, no !

HELEN. Has he ever tried to ?

GER. No !

HELEN. Has he ever suggested it ?

GER. No !

HELEN. M-m-m ! That looks bad. It means you're dealing with a perfect gentleman. And they're the ones that always do the absolutely unexpected.

GER. Oh, but Jack won't ! And even if he did, I'm sure that he'd — Oh, but he won't ! Besides, it—it would spoil everything ! Helen, if—if he did, do — Which one of us do you think he'd choose ?

HELEN. How should I know ? What's he like ? What's he interested in ?

GER. Well, he loves music. He always gets me to play for him. But he's an artist by profession, and Marie's his favorite model. And last week he took Florence to the theatre three times, because he's interested in the drama. They both write plays, you know.

HELEN. That's nothing ; so do I. So do you. So does everybody.

GER. I suppose so. But if Jack marries one of us, it won't be because of similar tastes. He's interested in almost everything !

HELEN. Well, anyway, you're the prettiest.

GER. Jack doesn't think so. He thinks Marie is, and I think Florence is.

HELEN. You say you're a good cook ?

GER. Yes, but so are the others.

HELEN. You're the most athletic.

GER. Oh, no ! We're about the same.

HELEN. Great heavens ! Then why don't you match pennies for him ?

GER. But—but we don't want him ! That is, except the way that we've got him. Why, we never thought of marrying him ! The idea never entered our heads ! That is, not until now !

HELEN. Then my seed has fallen on fertile soil ?

GER. N-o, I don't think so. In fact, I think you've given us a timely warning. We—we're all so fond of Jack, and—and it would be so hard to get along without him. Why, now that you have opened our eyes, we'll be on our guard, and if he shows any signs of committing matrimony, why—why — Oh, but I know he won't. I know he won't !

HELEN. Oh, have it your own way. But mark my words. That kind of blissful arrangement never lasts long. Some other man may appear on the horizon.

GER. Nonsense! No one could ever be as nice as Jack.

HELEN. Well, how about some other girl?

GER. Y-es, I know—but—don't you think that I—that we could hold him—all three of us?

HELEN. Not if he was in love with her!

GER. Love? Pooh!

HELEN. Yes, love. All men are capable of it, and nice men especially so.

GER. Well, if we see him falling in love we'll — What are the symptoms?

HELEN. Sometimes there aren't any. Sometimes a proposal comes out of a clear sky.

GER. Oh! Well, let's hope that Jack has symptoms first, so that we can save him from the designing female. Don't worry; I'll call a council of war this evening, and we'll prepare for all emergencies.

HELEN. He might fool you some other way. He might go in for golf!

GER. Horrors! Do you suppose so? Let's change the subject! We've talked about Jack enough; it will make him conceited. Anyway, I've thought of something to tell you. Do you remember I wrote you that I'd tried my hand at composing?

HELEN. I believe that you did mention that you had given way to temptation.

GER. Well, I've had two songs published, and I've just finished a third!

HELEN. Splendid! I suppose Florence wrote the words, and Marie designed the cover?

GER. No, indeed; Jack did! Oh, dear, we weren't going to talk about Jack, were we? Well, to continue; I feel sure that if I tried to do something bigger I could, an operetta, you know, or even a short opera, so Jack's writing a —

HELEN. Jack, Jack, Jack! Come, now; confess!

GER. Confess? Confess what?

HELEN. That you're not so entirely indifferent to Jack?

GER. Indifferent? Of course not! I—I like Jack a lot, but—but I'm not in love with him, if that's what you mean! I—I don't like him any more than the others do! That is, I —I don't! Really, really, I don't!

HELEN. Really?

GER. Really, really, really!

HELEN. Then I suppose you don't! Go on!

GER. Well, you see, I've written the opening chorus, and Jack is —

(A door slams; she pauses; FLORENCE comes dashing in.)

FLO. Oh, Gertrude, Gertrude! What do you suppose?
(Sees HELEN.) Why, Helen!

(She falls on her neck; kisses her exuberantly.)

HELEN. Dear me! You seem excited!

FLO. *Excited?* Well, I should say so! I've just been proposed to!

BOTH. No! Where? Who?

FLO. Right on the campus! I was hurrying home, and I heard some one call, so I turned around, and there was Jack —

GER. Jack!

HELEN. Jack!

FLO. Yes, Jack Hemmingway!

HELEN. Upon my word!

GER. Go on.

FLO. Well, he came up and shook hands, and started to walk to the subway with me. He didn't say anything for a few minutes, and then he suddenly whirled around and grabbed my hands and asked me to marry him!

GER. And—and what did you say?

FLO. I—I said it was so sudden.

GER. And you didn't say yes?

FLO. Why, no—I said I'd let him know—that I'd write him.

GER. Thank heaven!

FLO. Why—why?

HELEN. Yes; why "Thank heaven"?

GER. Why—why—simply that—that I thought we'd agreed that none of us was to marry him.

FLO. What?

GER. That is—why—we—we had a plan all worked out, and it doesn't seem fair to—to — Well, you started ahead of time, and spoiled everything.

FLO. I don't understand.

GER. Why—why—you see, I—we'd never thought of Jack in that light, and—and—it—seemed as though—as though —— (*Breaks down and commences to weep.*) Oh, I do think it's too mean for anything!

FLOR. Gertrude! Dearest! You don't mean you're jealous of me?

GER. No! No! But—I'm—disappointed.

FLOR. You poor dear! Why, I never dreamed you were in love with him.

GER. I'm *not* in love with him! But—but—I hate to see our lovely plan spoiled.

FLOR. That's all right, dear! I'm not going to marry him, anyway!

GER. You're not?

FLOR. Goodness, no! Why, I—— Even if I did, I couldn't bear to make you unhappy.

GER. You darling!

FLOR. I'll write him to-night, and tell him that there is absolutely nothing doing! You—you don't want me to add a postscript, a deep secret postscript, that you were terribly cut up over his proposing to me?

GER. Gracious, no! I'm—I'm not in love with him. Not the least bit! Really I'm not. (*Wistfully.*) I—I don't care how much he proposes to you.

FLOR. Well, he won't do it again! Here, I'll write to him now, and tell him that all is over between us!

(*Starts to write.*)

GER. But—but do you think he'll get over it?

FLOR. Of course! It was raining, and his feet were wet; that's all!

HELEN. That was probably it. Seven of the men who proposed to me before I was twenty chose rainy days, and six of them didn't have on rubbers. (*FLOR. continues writing; GER. sinks down on the sofa with a most dejected air.*) Why, what's the matter, Gertrude? You look pale!

GER. Oh,—I—I—I'm just so relieved that Jack—*isn't*—*isn't* going to get married.

HELEN. Maybe he is, though! Maybe he'll ask you next.

GER. (*clapping her hands together*). Oh, I—I—well, that would be all right, because I'd refuse him, of course!

HELEN. Of course!

FLOR. Here. The letter's finished ; I'll mail it at once.

GER. Were—were you very firm ?

FLOR. Firm as Gibraltar !

GER. Then *that's* all right ! Do hurry and mail it !

FLOR. (*starting out*). In a jiffy.

(*A door bangs ; MARIE enters on the run.*)

MARIE (*throwing her wraps in every direction*). Girls !
I — Oh, Helen ! You ! (*Kisses her.*) Thank heaven,
there's one experienced person here ! Girls, I've been pro-
posed to !

ALL. No !

MARIE. Yes ! Not an hour ago ! I was working at the
studio on Mrs. Sherman's portrait, and some one knocked, but
I was so busy I didn't want to be disturbed, so for a long time
I didn't answer. The knocking went on. Then I opened the
door, and there was Jack !

ALL. Jack Hemmingway ?

MARIE. Yes ! Dear old Jack ! I told him he couldn't
come in, but he said it was very important, so I let him—and
then before I knew it, he'd asked me to marry him !

ALL. Good heavens !

GER. And—and what did you say ?

MARIE. Why, I—I said it was so sudden !

FLOR. Just what I said.

MARIE. Just what *you* said ?

FLOR. Gracious, yes ! Jack just proposed to me ten min-
utes ago.

MARIE. Well ! And did you accept ?

FLOR. Did you ?

MARIE. No, I—I told him I'd let him know to-morrow.

FLOR. I said I'd write. I have already.

MARIE. Did you say yes ?

FLOR. No, indeed ! I refused quite firmly ! Don't you
want me to add a postscript saying that you refuse quite firmly,
too ?

MARIE. Why, no, I don't think so.

FLOR. Oh, well, if you'd rather write yourself —

MARIE. Yes, and—and I think I'll say yes.

GER. Oh, Marie ! You wouldn't ?

MARIE. Why, Gertrude ! I don't see why I shouldn't.

GER. Oh, but—but —

MARIE. He asked me.

GER. Yes, but ——

MARIE. And he's a darling boy.

GER. (*wailing*). Oh, but Marie ——

MARIE (*in amazement*). Why, I believe you're in love with him yourself.

GER. I'm not! I'm not! But—but—there's the plan ——

MARIE. What plan?

GER. Why—why—you see—it ——

HELEN. Gertrude thinks that since you three are so indispensable to each other, and Jack is so indispensable to all of you, you ought to keep him just as he is.

GER. Yes, that's it! You know, Marie, if you went and got married, my hair would never look the same again!

MARIE. Oh, well, I suppose I'm *not* so very keen about Jack,—about marrying him, I mean.

GER. Oh, you darling! (*Kisses her.*) You'll tell him to-morrow?

MARIE. Yes.

GER. (*to FLOR.*). And you'll mail that letter right away?

FLOR. Yes.

GER. Oh, how splendid! I —— (*The telephone bell rings.*) Dear me, I wonder who that can be, at this hour of the night! (*Takes down the receiver.*) Hello! Hello! Yes—this is Gertrude. Who? Oh! Jack! (*HELEN throws up her hands; the other two cross toward the 'phone in great excitement.*) Yes. No, I'm not busy. No, I'm not too tired to listen. Why—why, Jack! This—this is so sudden! (*MARIE and FLOR. smother a shriek and fall into each other's arms.*) Oh, Jack, I—I'll tell you to-morrow. No, really—not now. No, Jack—really I can't—to-morrow—really—to-morrow—yes! Good-bye! (*She puts down the receiver, and at once becomes hysterical.*) Oh—oh, girls, did you ever hear of anything so—so ——

HELEN. I told you that a perfect gentleman was capable of anything! Jack certainly has a bad case of matrimonium tremens! Well, what are you going to do? Take my advice, and you'll send him a round robin letter of regret.

ALL. Oh, but ——

HELEN. Ah! So you all want him, really?

GER. No. I don't want him. I wouldn't have a man who had proposed to any one else.

MARIE. Well, I'm not particularly anxious!

FLOR. Not for mine, either.

HELEN. Then get rid of him.

ALL. Oh, but ——

HELEN. Well, for heaven's sake! (*She gazes at them in utter despair. The telephone bell rings.*) Gracious! You don't believe he's going to ask me now, do you?

GER. (*answering the 'phone*). Yes, this is apartment 34; yes, Miss Roberts is here.

HELEN (*sinking into a chair*). Mercy on us! This is so sudden!

GER. Oh, Miss Farr! Send her up! (*Puts down the receiver.*) It's Margaret Farr; she's calling for you.

HELEN. Oh, yes! I 'phoned her that I was coming here, and she could take me home if she wanted to. Well, girls, I'm going to leave you to your own devices regarding brother Jack. Of course, never having met the gentleman, I can't offer an expert opinion, but my unofficial advice is—can him!

GER. Oh, but ——

(*The door-bell rings; FLOR. goes and returns followed by MARGARET.*)

MAR. Greetings, Helen! (*Kisses her.*) How are you, girls? My, but it's been ages since I saw you!

MARIE. I know; won't you sit down?

MAR. Can't possibly; it's terribly late.

HELEN. Then I'm afraid we'll have to go.

(*Puts on her wraps.*)

MAR. Helen's going to have tea with me to-morrow afternoon; won't you come, too? I do so want you to meet my intended.

FLOR. Your intended? Why, you're not engaged?

MAR. Yes! Didn't you know? I've been engaged for a week to the dearest man! Oh, I know you'll all love Jack!

ALL. Jack!

GER. Jack—Jack Hemmingway?

MAR. No. Jack Baker.

ALL (*wilting into chairs*). Oh!

MAR. Why, what's the matter?

HELEN. Nothing, dear. I'll tell you on the way home. Good-night, girls; and remember what I told you, can him.

ALL (*faintly*). Yes.

MAR. Good-night!

(She and HELEN go out.)

ALL *(faintly)*. Good-night.

(They sit there for several moments, looking at each other hopelessly.)

MARIE. Well?

FLOR. Well?

GER. Well?

(There is a long pause; suddenly FLOR. springs to her feet.)

FLOR. Why, why, how perfectly ridiculous!

THE OTHERS. What?

FLOR. Why, it's a bet, of course! Men are always making crazy bets like that. Jack's bet some man that he can get a girl to accept him within twenty-four hours, or something like that.

GER. I don't believe it.

MARIE. Well, I do! It's just like Jack.

FLOR. He probably thought we wouldn't mind, because we're such good friends.

GER. Well, I mind. I think it's horrid.

MARIE. Oh, no. We all know each other so well.

FLOR. Of course! But still he deserves to lose the bet for not taking us into his confidence.

MARIE. Oh, no! Jack would play fair; he wouldn't win a bet on a frame-up.

GER. Well, I—I think it's perfectly horrid. I—I'm going to bed!

(She goes out mournfully.)

MARIE. Well, I suppose we might as well do the same.

FLOR. Yes, but——

MARIE. What is it?

FLOR. Oh, nothing!

MARIE. Then come along!

(She switches out the light and they go off. There is a pause;

FLOR. steals back and takes down the telephone receiver.)

FLOR. Hello! 639 Spring. Hello,—Jack? This is Florence. Jack, was—was it a bet? Then—then I'll say yes, just for a little while, though, because—because I'm engaged al-

ready, you know. Y-e-s. Bob Durant! Oh, for ever so long! Yes—all right. You're a dear, Jack! Good-bye!

(As she is about to go out, she hears a noise and hides.

MARIE enters and goes to the telephone; takes down the receiver.)

MARIE. Hello, hello! 639 Spring. Hello, Jack. This is Marie. Yes—Jack, tell me, was—was it a bet? Oh, how perfectly darling! Then, Jack—if you want, I'll—I'll say yes,—but just for a little while, you know, because—because—well, I'm—I'm engaged already! Oh, yes, for weeks and weeks! To Harry Fisher. Oh, how darling of you! Jack, you're simply adorable. Yes—yes. All right! Yes—good-night.

(She hangs up the receiver. FLOR. pounces upon her.)

FLOR. Oh, Marie, you darling!

MARIE. You heard?

FLOR. Yes! And so am I! Bob Durant!

MARIE. Oh, dearest! Sh! What's that?

(They both draw back into the shadow as GER. comes stealing in in a dressing gown. She goes to the telephone and takes down the receiver.)

GER. Hello! Hello! 639 Spring. Hello, is this Jack? Jack, this—this is Gertrude. Jack, it—it wasn't a bet, was it? Oh, you darling! I knew it wasn't! Oh, dearest! No, of course you won't have to wait till to-morrow! Yes!—Yes—yes—yes, yes, yes! Oh, Jack, you don't know how happy I am! Yes—all right! To-morrow at eleven. Yes—yes! Good-night, dearest—yes! Good-night! Good-night!

(She hugs the telephone instrument ecstatically for a moment; then she steals out of the room. The others come forward and execute a wild dance of joy.)

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